

VZCZCXRO0236
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSL #0455/01 2991603
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P R 261603Z OCT 09
FM AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0223
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEHSL/AMEMBASSY BRATISLAVA 0263

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 BRATISLAVA 000455

SIPDIS

DOD PASS TO OSD/P
STATE PASS TO EUR/CE, EUR/RPM, EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [MARR](#) [BIH](#) [LO](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: ASD VERSHBOW'S MEETING WITH SLOVAK FOREIGN MINISTER LAJCAK:
GOOD NEWS ON AFGHANISTAN, CONCERNS ABOUT BOSNIA

BRATISLAVA 00000455 001.2 OF 004

CLASSIFIED BY: Keith A. Eddins, Charge d'Affaires, a.i., State.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) SUMMARY: In an October 22 meeting prior to the opening of the Bratislava NATO defense ministerial, FM Lajcak told ASD Vershbow that the Slovaks would use the ministerial to announce a 150-soldier increase in their troop strength in Afghanistan (to 400), as well as the lifting of most -- but not all -- of the caveats under which their forces now operate. Lajcak also reviewed a laundry list of European security issues, expressing deep personal concerns about the situation in Bosnia, citing a 'window of opportunity' on Macedonia, and expressing the hope that the preparation of the Alliance's new Strategic Concept would be transparent and inclusive, giving countries such as Slovakia a real voice in the drafting process. Vershbow welcomed the Slovak decisions on Afghanistan, reassured Lajcak that the U.S. was committed to all NATO allies contributing to the new Strategic Concept, and agreed with the Slovak foreign minister on the importance of managing NATO-Russia relations well. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) Slovak Foreign Minister Lajcak opened his October 22 meeting with visiting Assistant Secretary of Defense Vershbow by expressing Slovakia's appreciation for Vice President Biden's ongoing trip to Central Europe; he said that the Vice President's public statements -- including the speech he had just delivered in Bucharest -- were sending 'all the right messages' to the region. He particularly welcomed Biden's recognition that the CEE countries are no longer transitional, but have now become solid, 'normal' members of the western community. Lajcak said 'it's now our turn to demonstrate that you made a good investment' in Central Europe. He added that this was the message he was hearing from both President Obama and the Vice President Biden, and Slovakia took this message to heart.

13. (C) In this regard, Slovakia intended to use the NATO defense ministerial to announce an increase in its troop commitment of approximately 150 soldiers, raising its total contribution to 400. The Slovaks also intended to lift most (albeit not all) caveats on the deployment of those troops. Defense Minister Baska would discuss the details on October 23, but Lajcak said the increase would include creating a Slovak-led OMLT, as well as providing patrol units and "multi-task" troops who could provide protection for Slovak engineering units, who will now be allowed to leave the bases to which they had previously been restricted. Lajcak said Prime Minister Fico was not yet prepared to allow "combat units" (meaning Special Forces acting

independently from support of Slovak engineers) until after the June 2010 Slovak parliamentary elections, fearing that such a move would be used against him by the opposition. Vershbow welcomed the immediate Slovak decision, and also urged them to continue to expand both the size and scope of their mission once a new government was in place in 2010.

14. (C) With regard to NATO's next Strategic Concept, Lajcak welcomed new SYG Rasmussen's approach, but emphasized that the preparation and drafting of the documents needs to be "transparent and inclusive." Given that not all NATO members are represented on former-Secretary of State Albright's team of experts, he said it would be unwise simply to present the NAC with a "final" document for approval. The entire NAC -- meaning all NATO Allies -- needs to be fully involved in the development of the new Strategic Concept throughout the process; otherwise he feared that NATO would face the same problems the EU did when it presented its ill-fated European Constitution to member states, many of whom did not feel they had been adequately involved in the drafting. Vershbow responded that ex-Secretary Albright well understood the needs of Central Europeans, and he said the U.S. agreed that all Allies should have a hand in preparing the new Strategic Concept. He said the U.S. also supported SYG Rasmussen's overall approach to reforming Alliance structures, which we hope will lead to budgetary savings.

15. (C) Lajcak noted that the Strategic Concept drafters will be hard-pressed to find the right balance between Article 5 commitments and NATO's out-of-area commitments and needs, particularly given the divergent views of Allies (e.g., Poland and the Baltic states vs. older members). He suggested that the exercise might also provide a good opportunity to increase cooperation and communications with NATO's international partners, particularly the UN and EU. He opined that it was 'insane' not to have official communications channels between

BRATISLAVA 00000455 002.2 OF 004

NATO and the EU. Vershbow agreed and noted the renewed efforts the U.S. was putting into seeking a Cyprus solution that would -- by extension -- permit greater NATO-EU communications. On Article 5, Vershbow assured Lajcak that the U.S. was equally committed to finding the right balance between expeditionary missions and core Alliance security requirements.

16. (C) On Russia, Lajcak suggested that the U.S. and NATO take Moscow's actions at face value, not adopting policies that were either reflexively pro-Russian or anti-Russian. The Alliance needed to be open with and to Moscow, but without compromising our core principles. We need Russian cooperation on difficult issues such as Afghanistan, piracy, terrorism and Iran, and thus we need pragmatic, open relations. But Russia cannot be given a veto over NATO membership decisions, Lajcak insisted, nor can it assume a renewed sphere of influence in the old Soviet space. Lajcak noted that he had been in Moscow just before the U.S. announced its new approach to missile defense (which, he added, the Slovaks welcomed as addressing the needs of all Allies), and found his Russian interlocutors in a relatively positive mood vis-a-vis NATO and the U.S. Vershbow said the U.S. was encouraged but realistic about the Moscow's response to the President's decision on missile defense, and noted that we were seeking to implement the Obama-Medvedev agreement to conduct a common threat assessment with the Russians. The big question, Vershbow continued, was whether the Russians would be able to acknowledge that Iran presented a real threat; even now they were offering mixed signals on sanctions. Lajcak agreed, noting that the Russians wanted it both ways on Iran, but he opined that waiting for Iran to actually create a nuclear warhead would be much too late for all concerned.

¶17. (C) On NATO's 'open door' policy, Lajcak suggested that the recent Greek elections have opened a window of opportunity for bringing Macedonia into the Alliance sooner than anticipated. He said the Greek government was signaling that it was open to a quick compromise on Macedonia's name as it begins its new term from a position of relative strength; the longer we wait, the more difficult it will be. On MAP for Montenegro, Lajcak was also quite positive and said Slovakia supports it; Montenegro is now a 'normal' country, whose small size shouldn't matter. Lajcak also leaned toward early MAP for Bosnia, even if the country doesn't meet all the criteria, given the positive political signal it would send to a number of different audiences.

¶18. (C) Continuing on Bosnia, Lajcak -- the former UN/EU high representative there -- noted that he had just returned from a trip to the Balkans with Deputy Secretary Steinberg and Carl Bildt. He opined that the political situation was worse than when he (Lajcak) left Sarajevo in mid-winter to take over the Slovak MFA. The Bosniaks were frustrated by the EU's position on visa liberalization, and believe the Serbs are effectively preventing them from getting NATO MAP status. The Republika Srpska leadership is -- according to Lajcak -- generally supportive of MAP, but the ethnic Serbian population is not. Putting objective criteria aside, giving MAP to Bosnia would be a powerful political signal that NATO should consider. And we should be cautious, he added, about any linking of MAP for Western Balkan states to the separate path Ukraine and Georgia are following. To delay Montenegro and Bosnia because of Ukraine and Georgia would, in effect, be giving the Russians undue power over the Western Balkans and NATO's own decision-making. Statements such as that by Ukraine's former Acting Foreign Minister that MAP for Montenegro would be a 'hostile act' shouldn't be given undue weight; otherwise Ukraine would be holding other prospective members hostage.

¶19. (C) Vershbow agreed that the former Soviet space -- particularly questions involving Ukraine and Georgia, but extending eastward -- was 'still scratchy' and problematic. NATO needed to keep the "open door" open, and we were certainly encouraging the Macedonians to make every effort with the Greeks to reach an accommodation on the name issue. We need to keep working on Ukraine and Georgia, with their 'functional equivalent' of MAP, but recognize how tricky the issues are vis-a-vis Russia; Vershbow pointed to the Black Sea Fleet issue as one example of a festering problem that Moscow seeks to exploit.

BRATISLAVA 00000455 003.2 OF 004

¶10. (C) With regard to Bosnia, Vershbow acknowledge U.S. worries, and asked whether Lajcak was serious about Dodik's willingness to endorse MAP for Bosnia. Lajcak said that Dodik was indeed in favor of MAP and eventual NATO membership, but his constituency still was not. Nor was Dodik so committed that he would put NATO ahead of other, domestic issues. Lajcak lamented that the sides in Bosnia were now further apart than we left the High Representative in March to become Slovak foreign minister. We are without sticks or carrots, he suggested, and the status quo suits the ethnic Serbs' needs at present. Taking something -- like MAP -- away as a 'punishment' was not going to have an effect, and would only further isolate the country. He therefore encouraged early MAP as a way to wrap Bosnia a bit more closely into Europe, perhaps giving Dodik some additional cover for further work within the ethnic Serb community.

¶11. (C) On Georgia and Ukraine, Lajcak said that in recent

meetings he found the Georgian foreign minister more realistic than his (just replaced) Ukrainian counterpart, who seemed to be seeking 'something spectacular' in advance of the Ukrainian presidential elections. Vershbow agreed that the Georgians were more realistic and better understood the constraints, pointing to their acceptance of a gradual step-by-step approach to security assistance that started with training, doctrine development and military education to promote reform of the armed forces before weapons acquisition could be considered.

¶12. (C) Turning to Kosovo in response to Vershbow's query about recognition, Lajcak confirmed that Bratislava would not be granting formal recognition 'within the next year or two' given political realities in Slovakia. But he assured Vershbow that Slovakia would be 'practical and pragmatic,' noting that he had taken a number of steps as foreign minister to make the Slovakia-Kosovo relationship more normal (e.g., accepting Kosovo passports, accepting IMF and World Bank membership). Lajcak also noted that Slovakia actually wanted to slow down the reduction of Slovak forces in KFOR; he said he thought a drawdown from 140 to two was too precipitous and sent the wrong political signal. Thus, the Slovaks would be working within NATO to slow down their withdrawal so that they retained a more appropriate proportion of forces there over the coming years.

¶12. (C) On Serbia, Vershbow explained that the Southern European Defense Ministers (SEDM) had just agreed to accept Serbia as a full member along with Montenegro, despite some concerns about Belgrade blocking future Kosovo membership; the U.S. supported this, however, as a step in encouraging Serbia's integration in the Euro-Atlantic community. Lajcak welcomed the move, noting that the Serbs could act pragmatically; he pointed to a recent Visegrad Four event in Budapest at which the V4 found a formula that permitted both Serbia and Kosovo to attend and sit at the same table. The key Lajcak said, was to focus on substance, not symbols, as well moved forward with reintegrating Serbia into Europe.

¶13. (C) EMBASSY COMMENT: ASD Vershbow's October 21-22 bilateral program -- prior to the formal opening of the Bratislava informal NATO defense ministerial -- was an extremely useful opportunity for us to engage with key Slovak international security and foreign policy interlocutors. In addition to his meeting with Lajcak, Vershbow saw Political Director Slobodnik, Chief of Defense Staff General Bulik, and MOD Secretary General Demetrian. He also met with an influential group of non-governmental foreign and security policy experts (on the margins of a Slovak Atlantic Commission conference at which he also spoke), and effectively engaged with the press on issues such as missile defense, Afghanistan, and the future of NATO.

¶14. (C) COMMENT, continued: Slovak officials such as Lajcak -- as well as Deputy Prime Minister Kalinak and Defense Minister Baska (who met with Secretary Gates, septel) -- generally take a solid, Atlanticist line in their dealings with U.S. and NATO officials. And on many issues they cooperate closely with us. But they often find themselves having to walk back Prime Minister Fico's loose rhetoric, as they did October 22-23 following Fico's unsolicited statement to the press that he

BRATISLAVA 00000455 004.2 OF 004

would "never agree to locate any element of the missile defense system in Slovakia." Lajcak, in his meeting with Vershbow, shook his head wearily as he sought to explain his PM's comments as referring to "sovereign prerogatives," while reiterating -- as did Kalinak with Secretary Gates -- that Slovakia fully supported and endorsed the new U.S. scheme as a valuable NATO project.

¶15. (U) This telegram was cleared by ASD/ISA Vershbow.
EDDINS